



Personal protective equipment position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the principles the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers should apply to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the responsibilities of employers and workers in its use. It is part of the ANMF suite of workplace health and safety (WHS) position statements and should be read with the ANMF position statements: *Workplace health and safety* and *Protecting workers from infectious diseases and hazardous chemicals*.

2. Definitions

Personal protective equipment (PPE) refers to equipment designed to protect individual workers from exposure to infectious diseases or hazardous chemicals. It includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- gloves
- medical masks (flat, pleated, or 'cup shaped' surgical or procedure masks)
- goggles or face shields
- gowns
- respirators (N95 or FFP2 standard or equivalent)
- fluid resistant aprons.

3. Context

All workers have the right to a healthy and safe working environment.

In Australia, this right is protected through state, territory and national WHS laws and regulations.

The ANMF plays an active role in ensuring WHS rights are upheld and ensuring governments, health services and employers respond to new and emerging risks such as COVID-19.

This position statement was developed in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and is underpinned by the ANMF's Evidence Brief – *COVID-19: Personal protective equipment*.¹ However, it applies to any circumstance where clinical and risk assessments indicate PPE.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. All workers, including nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, have the right to work in a safe and healthy workplace.
2. Workers have rights relating to the provision and use of PPE and these rights are supported by relevant WHS and associated legislation, including regulations and codes of practice.

¹ ANMF evidence brief - *COVID-19: Personal protective equipment* is available at: https://www.anmf.org.au/media/km5biwgr/anmf_evidence_brief_covid-19-ppe.pdf. Please note: Evidence regarding COVID-19 is continually evolving. This evidence brief will be updated regularly to reflect emerging evidence but may not always include the very latest evidence in real-time. Please check with your ANMF representative.



3. Nurses and midwives have a duty of care to people with infectious diseases and must provide the same quality of care to them as they provide to others.
4. Preventing injury, illness and disease to workers must be the first WHS priority in the selection and use of PPE.
5. Where PPE is required, the employer must supply it.

Employer responsibilities

Risk management

6. Employers must:
 - eliminate or minimise their workers' exposure to infectious diseases and hazardous chemicals
 - eliminate or minimise the risks to workers arising from any workplace exposure to infectious diseases or hazardous chemicals.
7. Employers must manage these risks in accordance with the hierarchy of controls. This means:
 - at all times, higher order controls should be explored (such as eliminating exposure, substituting other ways of working, or introducing engineering controls) before relying on PPE, the lowest order control.
 - PPE must be recognised as the last line of defence and must always be used with other infection prevention and control measures.

Selecting PPE

8. Employers must:
 - consult with nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing when selecting, introducing, reviewing and changing PPE
 - provide information, training and instruction in:
 - the proper use and wearing of PPE
 - the proper storage and maintenance of PPE
 - the safe removal and disposal of PPE.

Supplying PPE

9. Employers must:
 - provide workers with appropriate PPE in all situations where it is indicated by clinical and risk assessments – this includes the mandated use of P2/N95 masks for all workers when a person is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19
 - take all reasonable steps to ensure an ongoing supply of PPE
 - ensure the PPE they supply is suitable and appropriate when considering:
 - the nature of the work
 - the nature of the risk
 - the size and fit needed to provide adequate protection
 - reasonable comfort for the wearer



Using and maintaining PPE

10. Employers must:
 - monitor and implement relevant state and national policies on the use and supply of PPE
 - constantly review best practice clinical care with respect to PPE and update practices
 - discourage PPE hoarding and inappropriate reuse and take measures to protect PPE from theft.
11. Employers must ensure:
 - that nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing wear PPE when indicated by clinical and risk assessments and not wear it when not indicated
 - nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing use PPE in line with best practice evidence-based recommendations
 - nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing are not required to do any tasks where PPE is indicated if there is no appropriate PPE available – these tasks must be left until appropriate PPE is available.
12. Employers must ensure:
 - all P2/N95 masks are appropriately fit tested in accordance with Australian Standard (AS/NZS1715:2009)
 - all PPE is properly maintained, repaired or replaced as per manufacturer instructions
 - PPE is not reused unless it is clearly marked as reusable
 - when PPE is reusable, it is reprocessed between uses as per manufacturer instructions and workers have clear instructions about how to do this
 - when PPE is not reusable, they provide an appropriate and safe means for disposing of it.

Worker PPE responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that all workers must:

13. wear prescribed PPE when and as lawfully and reasonably instructed
14. not intentionally misuse or damage any PPE
15. inform their employer of any damage, defect or need to clean, decontaminate or dispose of any PPE as soon as they become aware of this
16. immediately raise all safety concerns about themselves and others with their manager
17. take reasonable precautions to protect their own and others' health and safety – this includes refusing to work in unsafe working conditions such as when PPE has not been provided in line with health and safety guidelines
18. observe best practice in putting on, removing and disposing of PPE.

5. Position statement management

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